2

THE MUDUGAS - SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The Mudugas are a small tribe with a population of around 3000 people inhabiting mainly the Attappady area of Palakkad district (erstwhile Palghat) in north Kerala, bordering the Coimbatore district of Tamilnadu They are also seen spread in a few hamlets like Adivaram, Kalkothi, Kozhikoodam, Savakadu and Thanikandi in the border areas of Tamilnadu State

The Mudugas were mentioned for the first time as a tribes known as "Mudukkan" in an order issued by the Madras Government in November 1938 and the census report of 1941 recorded a population of 1,193 "Mudugans" from the Malabar district There is some obvious confusion or error in transliteration with regard to these terms "Mudukkan" or "Mudugan" Later both these names were replaced by the name "Muthuwar" in official records The official list of scheduled tribes (1956) recorded them to be the same as the Muthuwars of Devikulam taluk of Kottayam district Though, some ethnographers, (Louiz 1962), support this with a view that a section of the "Muthuwans" (Muthuvans) of Kottayam may have moved through the mountain tracts to the forest of Attappady valley, the fact remains that the Mudugas and the Muthuvans exhibits no similarities and they represent entirely different groups

It is also noted that the name "Mudugas" have been referred in-correctly as "Mudukkan", "Mudugan", "Muthuwan" and "Mudugar" by both the ethnographers and the census enumerators However, to avoid further confusion it is preferred here to use the name "Mudugas" for this tribe as followed by A Aiyappan (1958) , Furer-Heimendorf (1959), and P R G Mathur (1977)

There is some controversy regarding the origin of the name of Mudugas Ethnographers who referred to them as "Muthuvan" explained that the name must have originated from their "primitive" custom of carrying children on their "*muthuk*" meaning back (Louiz 1962 , Fuchs 1973) But this explanation appears not so convincing, since such a custom never existed among the Mudugas of Attappady as far the observation

goes If at all this custom existed among any tribe, it must have been among the "Muthuwans" of Kottayam district as Thurston (1909) described Moreover, the attribute of the custom of carrying children on the back suits more appropriate to the Muthuvans than Mudugas since the former has lexical similarities with the Malayalam word "muthuvu", (back) and hence their name as Muthuvan.

Informants say that, the name "Mudugas" is derived from the word *idi muduguthu*, meaning "Peals of thunder" They believe that they were born along with thunder and hence onginally were known as Idi Muduga (*idi*-thunder) They also have a notion that they are as strong as thunder This aspect regarding the etymology of the term is clearly emphasized in their famous saying "*munthipirannavan aaru ? mun konte ketti avan aaru ? idi mudugan aan !*"meaning "who is the one that has borne first ? who is the one that knot their hair to the front ? it is idi Mudugan !"

Dieter B Kapp (1978, 80, 85) identifies Mudugas along with the Kurumbas of Nilgiri and Wayanand and suggests that "Kurumba is a collective term for the tribal complex subdivided into seven groups -Betta Kurumbas, Jenu Kurumbas, Mullu Kurumbas, Urali Kurumbas, Alu Kurumbas, Palu Kurumbas, and the Mudugas However, he says that "all these tubes are distinct ethnic groups differing in language, culture, religious beliefs, and customs and manners" (1978 168)

Mudugas inhabit mostly the forest areas of south-western foot hills and in the southern part of the Attappady valley distributed in about 21 hamlets The Muduga hamlets called *ooru* is a cluster of huts (*koorai*) varying between 10 to 30 huts

Attapaddy literally meaning valley (*padi*) of leeches *{atta)* is an area in the Mannarkad taluk of Palakkad district situated between 10 54' and 11 14' north latitude and 76 27' and 76 48' east longitude It is about 250 square miles in extent, and lies behind the ridges of western ghats which extend south-west to the Palghat gap (Aiyappan 1948) Attappady is one of the prominent forest regions of Kerala with abundant vegetation, and extensive forest growths providing a refreshing greenness to the prospect, and most part of the area has an elevation ranging from 1200 to 3000 feet The area comprises of three panchayats namely, Agali, Pudur and Sholayur with a tribal population of about 9551, 7130 and 7591 respectively (according to 1991 census)

The main tribes living in the Attappady region are Irulas, Mudugas and Kurumbas numbering about 19,299, 2755 and 1280 respectively (ATDP survey 1991)[1]. Apart from the tribal communities, Attappady valley is also inhabited by many caste groups of Hindus, Christians and Muslims from the plains and the Tamil speaking Goundans and Chettis An analysis of the population of Attappady shows that the tribal people who once formed the majority is getting reduced to a minority year by year The tribal population of the area according to 1971 census was 15,809 as against 13,133 in 1961 census However, this is due to the increased immigration of Christians and Hindus from the plains of Kerala and Tamil Goundans from Coimbatore The tribals which formed the majority in 1961 census (63% of the total population) was reduced to a minority (40 3%), and still further in 1981, they are reduced to 33 18% eventhough the population increased to 20,659 In 1991, tribal people number 24272 forming just 26 95% of the total Attappady population

The area is tropical in climate and vegetation with occasional stands of Cycas palms and certain thorny shrubs like *Lendana camera (parale chedi)* The annual rainfall vanes from 40 mm from Coimbatore side to 200 rams in the dense evergreen forests in the western and southern parts of the valle> bulk of which received dunng the two monsoons the south-west monsoon, which brings most of the ram, between June and August and the north-east monsoon in October and November The Mudugas identify mainly three seasons — a dry season called *kara gah* between March and May, a wet or rainy season called *koda gah* between June and August and the cold winter season during September to November called as *konda gah* November to February is the major harvest season and is termed according to the harvest of respective crops like *same gah* (Nov – Dec) and *tuvarigah* (Jan – Feb) etc

Bhavani and *Siruvani* are the two important nvers which dram the whole of Attappady valley and these nvers have all the potentialities for irrigating the entire area However, no development schemes have been put forward as yet for the effective utilization of this water resource, and most of the area still remains dry

The red loam mixed latente soil is generally fertile In the Summer, soil is too hard for digging and in the monsoon it is too muddy and sticky The principal crops cultivated by the tribal people of the area are *rai* (finger millet - *Eleusine corocana),*

same (little millet –*Panicum miliaccum*) ; *tuvati* (red gram – *Cajanus indicus*) ; *cholam* (maize - *Zea maize)* ; *kaduku* (mustard-*Brassica nigra*); *keera* (amaranth - *Amaranthus hypochondriacs)* ; *sakkare* (cucumber –*Cucumis sativus*) etc., on the sloppy dry lands. On the small amount of low lying wet land between hill tracks and in the swamps, paddy and plantains are grown

The Mudugas, one of the three tribal groups of Attappady are seen mainly in the Agali and Pudur panchayat and rarely in Sholayur panchayat They claim as the early inhabitants of the area and subsist mainly on shifting cultivation supplemented by occasional hunting and gathenng With regard to the former history of the tribal groups of Attappady, wayanad, Nilgiri etc , various theories have been evolved Kapp concludes that these tribal communities

> " may well be considered as the modern representatives of ancient warrior tribes who once inhabited the plains of South India After encountenng calamitous defeats, the survivors fled and dispersed seeking shelter in the jungly areas of the Nilgiri Hills While settling there, they were forced to completely change their former mode of living and adapt themselves to their new surroundings and so, in the course of time, experienced a gradual re-development into tribes of food gathers, hunters and — later on — shifting cultivators" (1985 518)

Even if the Mudugas have migrated into this land from other parts, there is no evidence that in doing so they displaced any previous inhabitants This area remained greatly under-populated before 1950, after which the immigration from the plains started

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Attappady valley, the fact remains that the Mudugas and the Muthuvans exhibits no similarities and they represent entirely different groups.

Table 1.1 shows the distribution of Muduga households and Muduga population in the nine hamlets where household survey has been conducted

Table 1 1 Distribution of Mudugas

Name of hamlets	No of households	Males	Females	Total	%	No of people per household
Anakkal	21	60	60	120	12 52	5 71
Veettıyoor	24	56	53	109	11 37	4 54
Pottıkal	31	70	72	142	14 82	4 58
Thaze-Kakkupadı	18	54	37	91	9 49	5 05
Mele-Kakkupadı	10	26	33	59	6 15	59
Cholakkadu	12	24	31	55	5 74	4 58
Ommala	18	30	40	70	7 30	3 88
Mele-Abbannoor	17	38	33	71	7 41	4 17
Thaze-Abbannoor	40	121	120	241	25 15	6 02
Total	191	479	479	958	100	5 01

The table shows the distribution of Mudugas of 191 households in 9 hamlets From the table it is clear that the number of males and the number of females are almost equal Out of the total of 958 Mudugas, 479 are males and 479 are females However, the ratio vanes considerably at two hamlets At Thaze-Kakkupadı hamlet, the number of females per 100 males is 68 51, and at Ommala hamlet, the ratio is 133 3 females per 100

males From the table it is also clear that among the Mudugas, an household consist of an average of 5 01 members. This rate is high at Thaze-Abbannoor, where one household consist of an average of 6 members and it is very low at Ommala hamlet where it is 3 88.

Every Muduga hamlet is a social aggregate consisting of a core of patnhneal kin together with few affines Thus in addition to the male members of the patnhneal descent group along with their wives and children, a Muduga hamlet population also includes some affinal relatives However, all these people refer to themselves as residents of a particular hamlet The hamlet and its surrounding territory represents home for the descent group whose ancestors traditionally settled there and the affines are outsiders who have no permanent ownership or right m it It is seen that in almost all hamlets the percentage of children and babies are more when compared to that of adults Table 1 2 shows the age-sex distribution of 958 Mudugas in the sample

Table-1 2 Age-sex distribution of Mudugas

Age-Group	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
0 -4	53	11 06	47	981	100	10 43
5 -9	71	14 82	70	14 61	141	1471
10- 14	71	14 82	65	13 56	136	14 19
15- 19	44	9 18	54	11 27	98	1022
20-24	39	8 14	49	10 22	88	9 18
25 – 29	43	8 97	53	11 06	96	10 02
30-34	40	8 35	36	751	76	7 93
35-39	46	9 60	32	6 68	78	8 14
40-44	14	2 92	13	2 71	27	281
45-49	19	3 96	17	3 54	36	3 75
50 – 54	13	271	12	2 50	25	2 60
55-59	11	2 29	16	3 34	27	2 81
60-64	6	1 25	6	1 25	12	1 25
65 – 69	4	0 83	5	1 04	9	0 93
70-	5	1 04	4	0 83	9	0 93
Total	479	100 00	479		958	100 00

The Table shows that out of the total 958 people, 14 71% falls within the age group 5-9 and 39 35% of the total sample are below the age of 14 52 08% of the people

fall between the age group **15-49** **The** people above 50 is very rare - 8 55%. It is also seen that among both males and females, the greatest population is between **the** age group 5-9.

The Muduga dialect which is often referred to by the Mudugas as *mudugar athu nayam or muduga basha* **is** basically of the South **Dravidian** family and contains elements of Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada (Zvelebil 1981) Tamil however **is** most predominant **in this** language and many of the personal names and kinship terms are derived from Tamil The dialect **is** distinct and **is** hardly intelligible to Malayalam speakers Nowadays most young men speak **in** addition some Malayalam and Tamil and they use frequently these languages **in** their interaction **with** outsiders Now the literacy and educational status of this tribe **is** coming up and children seek admission **in** the Tribal residential school and other government schools Table 1 3 presents the data regarding the educational status of Mudugas at present

Table- 1 3 Educational status of the Mudugas

CLASSES	Males				Females				Grand total Males & Females	%
	Below 15 yrs	Above 15 yrs	Total	Drop outs	Below 15 yrs	Above 15 yrs	Total	Drop outs		
LP (1-4)	66	41	107	58	42	26	68	34	175	20 39
UP (5-7)	39	30	69	45	36	17	53	38	122	14 21
HS(8-10)	9	30	39	34	8	20	28	22	67	7 8
College	-	5	5	2	-	1	1	1	6	0 69
							Total		370	43 12

The Table shows that 370 (43 12%) out of the total sample **is** literate at present The literacy rate among the male **(51** 64%) **is** higher than among the female (34 72%)

Out of the total sample only 7.8% is high school educated. The Table shows that out of the literate, 63 24% are drop outs

In a hamlet, the huts are seldom in isolation but are mostly built contiguous to each other Huts of close kin are erected in rows close to one another Every hut has a rectangular earthen base and a front porch called *dheetti* There are two tall bamboo posts six feet height in the centre for the roof support A long pole rests on the posts as the roof centre beam *(bitta)* The sloping roof structures are built up of bamboo splits as rafters (*alagu*) tied with vine overlying the cross poles (*poottu*) *Dharbha* grass *{Poa cynosuroides*) are arranged on top to make a rainproof roof

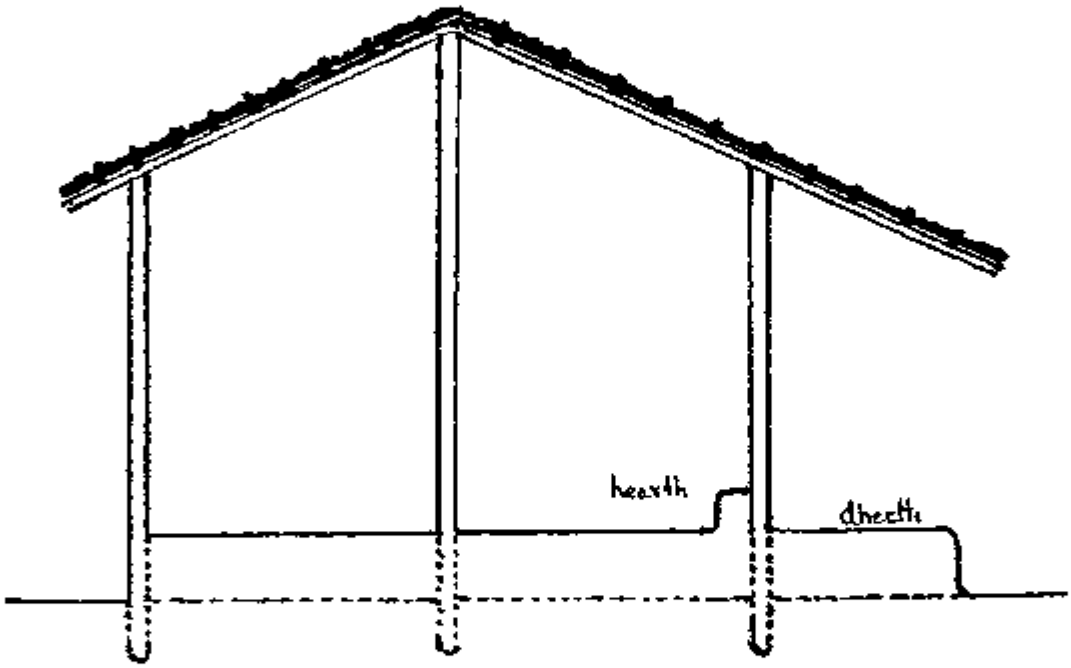

Fig 2 1 Vertical section of Muduga hut

The walls *(goda)* are made of bamboo splits interwoven like basket work and plastered on the inside with clay There is a small door (*basa*) formed by woven split bamboo's which opens to the *dheetti* The *dheetti* will be open or closed with bamboo walls While plastering, linings are made on the floor and the walls by running the fingers, giving rise to varieties or designs The interior of the hut is divided into two

roughly equal parts, one more secular, behind the **front** entrance called *vettara* and the other, near to fire place, more sacred called as *ullara.*

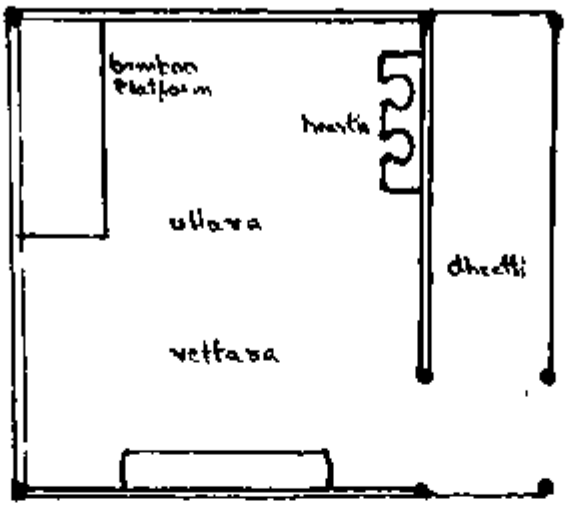

Fig 2 2 Ground plan of Muduga hut

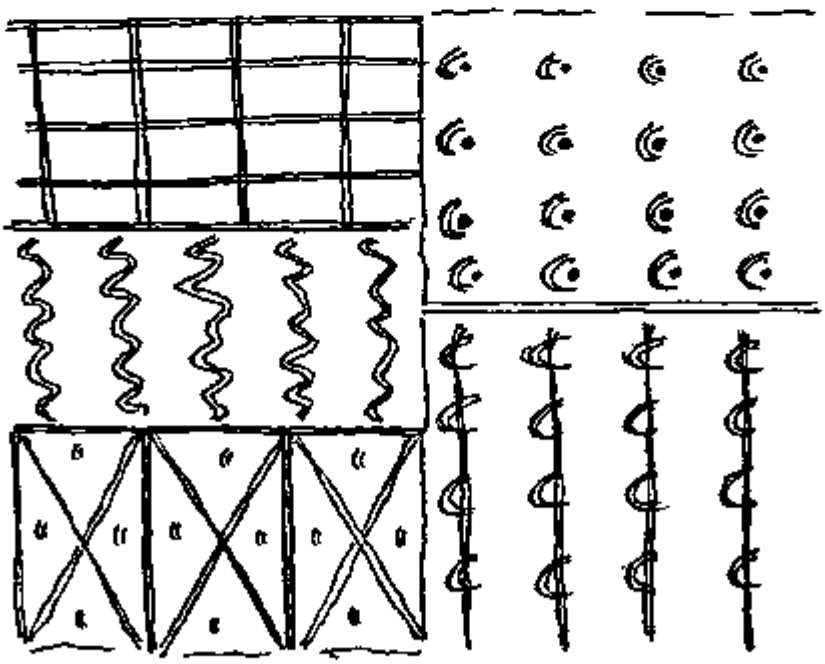

Fig 2 3 Fmger lining on the wall of Muduga hut

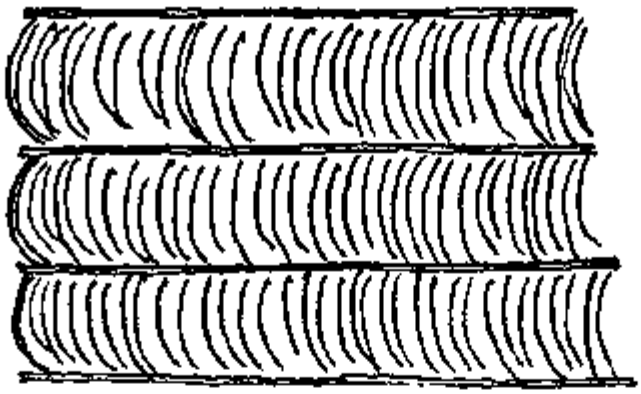

Fig 2 4 Finger linings on the floor of Muduga huts

The dress pattern of the Mudugas is very simple Women tie a cloth *(seela)* above the breast and knot it below the left arm pit which covers the body upto the knee Men usually wear lungi and shirt Women wear ornaments made of silver such as *kammal* (ear-ring), and other aluminium ornaments like *vala* (bangles), *panavala* (broad bangles), *kaikallu* (beaded bangles), *jerry* (decorated copper bangles) and necklaces made of black beads (*keeramala*) and silver coins (*kashu mala)* Nowadays every women wear a small nose ring called *michi* made of gold Most of the women do tattooing on their forehead

The Muduga subsistence economy mainly depends on shifting cultivation supplemented by occasional hunting, gathering and fishing Land is abundant and one can cultivate any extent of land according to his capacity The cultivation by clearing fresh field and burning is called *kari-kadu krishi* and the usage of previous plot is called *pakka-kadu krishi*[2] Hoes (*kothu* or *kunthali*) with small narrow blade are the most frequently used implement in soil preparation, and is done mainly by women Predominant crops cultivated by them are *rai, same,* and *tuvan* Also grown in small quantities are amaranth, beans, maize (corns), cucumber, plantains etc Food made of *rai* and *same* forms the bulk of their daily diet added with green leaves, tubers and

sometimes meat. Now rice has become an important part of their diet due to the coming of shops and markets.

The Mudugas occasionally resort to hunting and fishing to provide them with the animal protein they want Animals most frequently hunted for meat *(kari)*, are those which are plentiful or relatively easy to find and to shoot or trap and whose meat is generally desirable These animals include mainly *ma* (wild deer - *Rusa unicolor*),*koora ma* (mouse deer – *Tragulus meminna*),*kela* (barking deer –*Muntiacus muntjak*) , *Pullima* (spotted deer – *Axis axis*), *belilu* (flying squirrel - *Petaurista Philippensis*), *kattu-panti* (wild-pig-*Sus scrofa cristatus*), *eyyan* (porcupine - *Hystrix leucura*) , *keen* (mongoose - *Herpestes edwardsi*), *alinku* (pangolin, scaly antater - *Mams crassicaudata), utumbu* (monitor lizard — *Varanus bengalensis) mijalu* (rabbit — *Lepus nigncollis), pokken* (wild cat) *kattu koli* (wild fowls) and few varieties of birds

Traditionally, the hunting of animals was by trapping and they did not use bow and arrows Now-a-days they hunt in the forest with ordinary rifles In addition they construct a variety of traps like *binjivan* and *kathari* snares like *kudukku* or *kanni* and nests –*bale* which are used to catch most small game animals

Fishing is done in small groups usually by women and children mostly during rainy seasons when the river overflows and fill the nearby plains They fish by many techniques like small nets, basket traps, hooks, bombs, poisoning etc At times they catch crabs from the swamps, paddy fields and small streams

Gathering in the forest is of great importance both as a means of obtaining food and also as a source of raw materials A considerable portion of the diet comes from the roots, tubers and green leaves Mushrooms are highly desirable and are found in limited quantities and picked dunng the rainy season Collecting is done by both men and women The roots and tubers collected by the Mudugas mainly includes *noora kilangu* (powder root, - *Dioscorespentaphylla), savel kilangu or naaru* (thorny yam - *Dioscorea tomentosa), sole kilangu (Dioscorea sp), kavala kilangu (Dioscorea* sp) and *perukku kilangu* (Dioscorea sp)

The only tool used for collecting roots and tubers is the digging stick Digging stick known as *bajji* is made using the small branches of trees especially *kauri* (*Helecterus isora*) and sharpened at one end and stripped of their bark

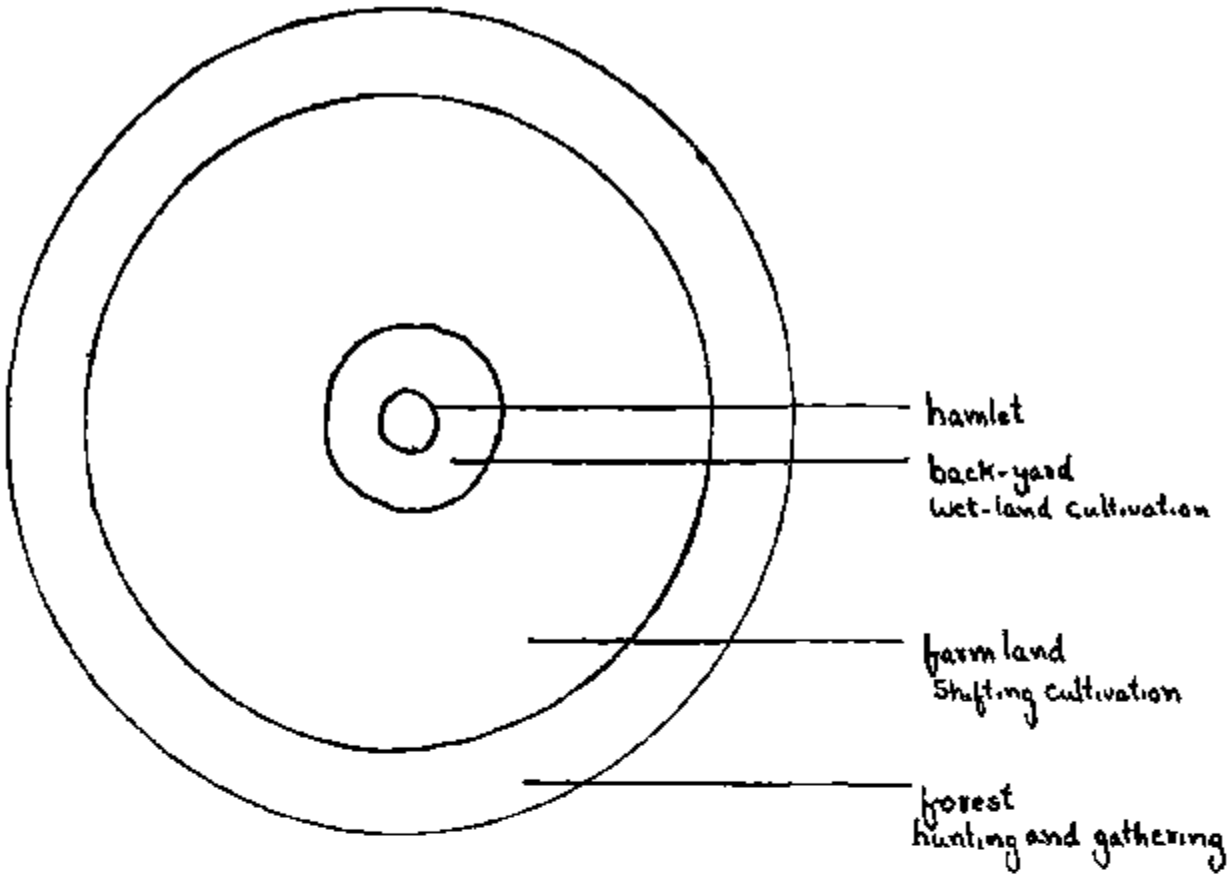

Fig 2. 5 Diagrammatic representation of hamlet and its surrounding territory

Forest products like bamboo, reed, grass, vines, wood etc , are used to manufacture household items like baskets, containers, brooms, tools and for constructing huts Medicinal herbs and roots, honey, bees wax, resin, bamboo, timber etc , are forest products used mainly for trade m the market The Mudugas identify four vaneties of honey bees They are, *kolen then* (3 5 mm small harmless bee - *Melipona iridipennis*), *komban then* (8 mm long little honey bee - *Apis florea*), *thoduthi* (12 mm long forest bee - *Apis indicus*) and *karinthen* (large rock bee — *Apis dorsata)*

Among the Mudugas, ownership of land is collective, in the sense that all the descendents of a common ancestor are joint owners of the hamlet and its territory The descent group has the sole right over the land and is controlled by the council members Regarding right to land, it is not the absolute freedom of the individual or the family that

matters, but he consent of the council members especially the headman of the hamlet, Close affines when in need may come and reside nearby their wife's father, wife's brother or maternal kin and cultivate a portion of their land. In some cases, daughters use their father's land throughout their life time But they do not inherit it, and consequently, cannot hand it on to their children.

Nuclear family is the primary unit of economic production and a new unit will be set up on the marriage of each young man. Marriage among the Mudugas is characteristically an exchange relationship between patnhneal segments and they practice strict kin group exogamy They have a Dravidian — type kinship terminology and practice bilateral cross-cousin marriage Thus, a man is prescribed to marry a woman of the category *attai*, a category that includes bilateral cross-cousins (FZD and MBD), but covers all women of the same genealogical level as ego who belongs to different exogamic group Within this category of bilateral cross-cousin, no preference is expressed to either side According to the traditional custom there is no elaborate marriage ceremony and the couple are considered married when the girl starts living in the boy's hut Bnde-pnce known as *pariya-panam* amounting to Rs 251 *VA* is given by the groom's family to the bride's family

Mudugas are permitted to marry more than once and it is not uncommon for both men and women to have a succession of two or more spouses one after the other in their life time However, they do not maintain more than one spouse at the same time Although endogamous, Mudugas intermarry with their neighbouring group Kurumbas too with whom they share a large number of basic cultural features in common

The Muduga religion is based on ancestral belief and worship with the elements of rituals and ceremonies It is the ancestors whose benevolence and protection they invoke by regular offerings They ha\ e ardent veneration and fear for their ancestors who are their best protectors and assist them when they are in need and difficulties The ancestral god is commonly called as *karudaivam* and is also referred by the kinship term *pattern,* meaning great grand-father The ancestors are propitiated at the time of sowing *{hethe idurathu)* and harvest ceremonies *{thodu)* officiated by the *mannukaran* (man of soil) who is the formal priest of the descent group and the hamlet Failure of proper

worship and offerings to the ancestors, they believe, will result in famine, low fertility of soil, low production of crops, diseases etc.

The Mudugas believe in the concept of a "supreme god" above all the other ancestors which is supposed to have diffused from the Hindu tradition This supreme god referred generally as *sami (sivan)* is believed to be the creator of all men and the universe, and have an important role in their mythological and religious concepts The Mudugas have adopted Him in their pantheon, and endowed Him with the tribal qualities as *Kakki Linkan*, and his wife *Parvathi* with the name *Neeli* It is to be mentioned here that, Mudugas are not worshipers *of Krishna* and never visit the Ranganathan temple, at Karamadai near Coimbatore, a famous pilgrim centre of Lord *Krishna*

The Mudugas visit the *Melleswaranmudi* (hill), which is the abode of *sami*, once in a year on *sivarathri* night and light lamp and offer lengthy *pooja* The *mannukaran* of Thaze-Abbannoor hamlet situated at the foot of this *Malleswaranmudi* is having the right to perform the ritual, and hence he is also known as *malapoojari*

Every hamlet has a headman called *moopan* who is also considered as the formal spokesman of the hamlet He is assisted by a *bandari* and a peon called *kuruthale* All these three members along with the *mannukaran* settle disputes and matters regarding bride-price by forming a *panchayath* along with other elders of the hamlet and so contribute to the maintenance of social control and solidarity All the four offices are hereditary in the male line

The elder members play a dominant role both within the community and in its relation with other hamlets It is they who arrange the marriage of their 'sons' and 'daughters' through discussions and negotiations Very often one or more of the elderly men in the hamlet will be specialist in herbal medicine who cures illness, and a diviner or exorcist (*pattukaran*) who identify the cause of disease with the help of magical spells There are also sorcerers among the Mudugas who through black magic (*odi*) can bring sickness or death to an enemy Most elderly men know something about the curing of minor ailments, but very few know how to cure serious illness and the requisite spells

The Mudugas distinguish disease mainly into two categories — few ailments are believed to be due to natural causes (*nattu noi*), but many accidents as well as illness are considered due to the malevolent actions of sorcerers, witches or evil spirits (*kattu noi*)

The latter one is distinguished into three types - *odi, pilli and kattu. Odi* is considered as the sorcery done by other caste people like Kuravar, Pulayar and Parayar. *Pilli* is the black-magic inflicted on them by their own people and *kattu* is the malevolent actions caused by witches or evil spirits like *pichathu, gali, bijju, geraga, thayi and thevva*

Though marriage and birth are not often marked by major ceremonies, among the Mudugas, death is often an occasion for elaborate ceremony They bury their dead and once in 40 to 50 years, elaborate dry-funeral (*bara-savu*) is held when the bones of the deceased are unearthed from the grave and after prolonged obsequies are buried in the rock cave called *gobbe*

Much of Muduga behaviour is patterned by rules between type of kin categories and between km groups The kinship system manifest itself in their marriage pattern, residence pattern and in their economic pattern of exchange of labour and shanng of food A Muduga individual has both responsibilities towards his km and privileges he may expect from the same These reciprocal obligations are more when they are more closely related

Apart from a very few anthropological studies and passing references in superficial ethnological surveys, little has been published or written about the Mudugas Unlike most other tribal groups of Kerala, the Mudugas came to be mentioned for the first time in Government records only in 1938 Twenty years later in 1958 the first anthropological work was launched `among the Mudugas' by the famous anthropologist A Aiyappan, but his work was restricted to the megalithic survival among the Mudugas After that, in 1959 Furrier - Heimendorf published a paper in *Man* dealing mainly with Mudugas hereditary friendship and inter tribal sex relations with the Todas of Nilgiris Further, in 1962 A A D Louiz for the first time presented a bnef ethnography on "Mudugar" in his *Tribes of Kerala* (1962 193-196), where he gives a brief outline of their social organisation, marriage rules, death custom and religion All these works were of introductory nature and after that "Mudugas" rarely appeared in anthropological literature This made A Aiyappan (1969 38) to express the need for an urgent anthropological research among this "little known tribe" Though, P R GMathur, a renowned anthropologist of Kerala did extensive field work among the Kurumbas of Attappady, was little interested in the neighbouring tribe, Mudugas But his book *Tribal*

situation *in Kerala* (1977) presents very little description of Mudugas. Similar was the work of Stephen Fuchs (1973) Later, few ethnohnguists like D B Kapp (1985, 89), Paul Hockings (1989), and Kamil V.Zvelebil (1981) did extensive research among the 'Nilgiri area' in general But their accounts all have strong linguistic emphasis and contain only few references to the Mudugas Other than these, no detailed and systematic study on Mudugas came out as yet As such the Mudugas need to be studied intensively

Notes ;

[1] Attappady Tribal Development Project

[2] At Thaze-Abbannoor, there are about six separate farm areas for shifting cultivation They are *beetti dhotta kadu, ellakara kadu, nelliara kadu, thoonkara male kadu, thuvakadavu kare, vage sole kadu* etc